

PAUL DUNBAR HEARD

GIVES A PRIVATE RECITAL

The Colored Poet Entertains Dr. and Mrs. Tobey, a Few of Their Friends and Others.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, the poet, the colored boy, and the voice of the colored people, the one who has won a place in the hearts of the mighty as well as the lowly, last evening read and recited several of his compositions for the pleasure of Dr. and Mrs. Tobey, a few of their friends, and a number of the inmates of the Toledo State Hospital for Insane. Paul Dunbar, the only one of his race who has evidenced decided literary talent, read and acted, and yet he was still just plain, unaffected Paul who does not feel the weight of his greatness. He is a familiar figure in Ohio, especially among the rich and the poor, and one marvels to think of him as the former elevator boy in Dayton who used to scribble short verses and take them home to his mother to entertain her.

As William Dean Howells has said, in introducing one of Dunbar's books: "What struck me in reading Mr. Dunbar's poetry was what had already struck his friends in Ohio and Indiana, in Kentucky and Illinois. They had felt, as I felt, that however gifted his race had proven itself in music, in poetry, in several of the other arts, here was the first instance of an American negro who had evinced innate distinction in literature. * * * So far as I could remember, Paul Dunbar was the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically. It seemed to me that this had come to its most modern consciousness in him, and that his brilliant and unique achievement was to have studied the American negro objectively, and to have represented him as he found him to be, with humor, with sympathy, and yet with what the read-

ing the impression it made on the negro auditor:

"An' I'd lak to tell you 'bout it—what we had—but I ain't able,
Mention jes' a few things, dough I know I hadn't orter,
Fu' I know 'twill staht a hank'rin' an' yo' mouf 'll 'mence to worter.
We had wheat bread white ez cotton an' a egg pone jes like gol'
Hog Jole, billin' hot 'n' steamin' roasted shbat an' ham sliced cold—
Look out! What's de mattah wif you?
Don't be fallin' on de flo';
Ef it's goin' to 'fect you dat way, I wont tell you nothin' mo'.
Dah now—well, we had hot chittlin's—now you'se tryin' ag'in to fall,
Cain't you stan' to hyeah about it?
E'pose you'd been an' seed it all;
Seed dem gread big sweet pertaters, lay-in' by de possum's side,
Seed dat coon in all his gravy, reckon den you'd up an' died!"

Then he goes on to tell how "Eldah" Thompson asked the blessing, when he, the elder, could hardly wait to commence to eat:

"Wish you'd seed dat colo'ed preachuh cleah his th'out an' bow his head;
One eye shet, an' one eye open—dis is evah wud he said:
'Lawd, look down in rendah mussy on slich generous hea'ts ez dese
Make us truly thankful, amen. Pass dat possum ef you please!"

Probably the "Cornstock Fiddle" is the best known of Mr. Dunbar's compositions to Toledoans, and as he himself recites it, it is certainly a treat. Losing all trace of what is known as the dialect, Mr. Dunbar next gives "The Poet and His Song," indicative of the extreme optimism of the colored folk, and the joy of song:

"A song is but a little thing,
And yet what joy it is to sing!
And when at eve I long for rest:
When cows come home along the bars,
And in the fold I hear the bell,
As Night, the shepherd, herds his stars,
I sing my song and all is well."

The last verse shows that even though the lot is hard to bear at times the heart is comforted by the song:

"Sometimes the sun unkindly hot,
My garden makes a desert spot;
Sometimes a blight upon the tree
Takes all my fruit away from me;
And then with throes of bitter pain
Rebellious passions rise and swell;
But life is more than fruit or grain,
And so I sing, and all is well."

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Mr. Howells goes farther, saying that it is the humorous quality which Mr. Dunbar has added to our literature and it will be this which will most distinguish him now and hereafter. But if Mr. Dunbar's style of writing is humorous, his style of reading is more so; while those of his compositions containing pathos and seriousness are only to be appreciated when coming to the ear in that peaceful, quiet cadence of Dunbar's voice. Then, he is not the poet who has delighted the hearts of the great, but he is the representative of the colored folk, telling his simple story. Much of his story is told with the eyes as with the voice and, to slightly misquote another of W. D. Howells's phrases, those same eyes express everything "from appetite to emotion." The appetite is wonderfully expressed in a little extract from "The Party," a story told by one negro to another, a recital of the good things to eat, show-

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